

VZCZCXRO9798

RR RUEHPA

DE RUEHBP #0462/01 1421418

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

R 211418Z MAY 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9147

INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0430

RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 0160

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHMFIASS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

RHMFIASS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

RHMFIASS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000462

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2018

TAGS: PTER PINS PINR ML

SUBJECT: OF TUAREGS AND TERRORISTS: A REBEL'S VIEW OF UNREST IN THE NORTH AND AQIM

REF: A. BAMAKO 00419

1B. BAMAKO 00414

1C. 07 BAMAKO 01006

1D. BAMAKO 00366

1E. BAMAKO 00299

1F. BAMAKO 00415

1G. BAMAKO 00371

1H. 07 BAMAKO 01255

Classified By: Political Officer Glenn Fedzer, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: A May 6 conversation with rebel leader/National Assembly Deputy Deity ag Simadou underscored the increasingly complex situation in the North of Mali and the need for active U.S. engagement with both the Malian government and the varied Tuareg factions who are key to establishing security in the Sahel region. During a wide-ranging discussion of the growing Tuareg rebellion, the April 10 execution of two Tuaregs in Kidal and the Austrian hostages held by AQIM, ag Sidamou, who doubles as the "finance" secretary for the Alliance for Democracy and Changes (ADC), explained the motivation behind the ADC attack on Diabali (Ref A), complained about alleged GOM diversion of counterterrorism funds to combat Tuareg rebels, and claimed that the ADC remains the only military force in northern Mali with the ability and the will to engage AQIM. Ag Sidamou's status as an ADC leader makes him an important interlocutor for USG understanding of at least one of the Tuareg points of view. His alleged connections to smuggling and purported economic facilitation of AQIM activities, however, weaken his credibility as an appropriate or effective USG partner in helping restore stability in the north . End Summary.

-----  
Ag Sidamou: Many Different Hats, Few Legitimate  
-----

2.(C) The Embassy met with Deity ag Sidamou, the National Assembly Deputy from Tessalit, on May 6 to discuss the Tuareg rebel attack in Diabali (Ref A) in central Mali earlier that morning. Ag Sidamou had been making the rounds of the Malian political and military establishments to distance himself from allegations that he was involved in the May 3 attack on a Malian military convoy destined for Tessalit (Ref B). Ag Sidamou's conflicting roles as a renowned trafficker, an ADC officer, and Tessalit's highest elected leader put him in a difficult position as many southern Malians and members of the Malian military are convinced that bandits could not orchestrate an attack outside of Tessalit without ag Sidamou's knowledge. Ag Sidamou, who was in Bamako on May 3, placed the responsibility for the attack on smuggler/bandit Merzouk ag Acherif. Several Malian newspapers nevertheless accused ag Sidamou of orchestrating the May 3 attack and

published grainy front page photographs of him wrapped in the traditional Tuareg turban, prompting ag Sidamou to tell the Embassy that he now feared for his own safety.

3.(C) Ag Sidamou was wounded during the ADC's attack on the GSPC in October 2006 (Ref C). He was elected to the National Assembly in July 2007 but rarely, if ever, attends National Assembly meetings in Bamako. Since he speaks neither French nor Bambara fluently, he is unable to follow debates on the Assembly floor without Tamacheck translations, which are normally not provided. Given his apparent disinterest in the workings of the National Assembly, his attendance record would likely not improve were he able to understand his fellow Deputies. His truancy record is matched by the Kidal's other three National Assembly Deputies - the two Intallah brothers and ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi.

-----  
Rebel Groups and the Kidal Executions  
-----

4.(C) While ag Sidamou blamed the bandit Merzouk ag Acherif for the March 26 attack in Aguelhok and the May 3 attack near Tessalit, he acknowledged ADC responsibility for the May 6 attack on Diabali. Ag Sidamou stated that the ADC motivation was to rearm itself so that it could improve its negotiating position with both the Malian government and Ibrahim Bahanga.

He stated that the catalyst for the ADC's decision to rearm, and break nearly two years of peace with the Malian government, was the April 10 execution of two Tuareg ADC members in Kidal and a falling out of sorts with Bahanga.

BAMAKO 00000462 002 OF 003

The ADC - presumably under the command of ADC officer Lt. Col. Moussa Bah - encouraged Bahanga to retaliate with renewed attacks against the Malian military. Bahanga apparently retorted that the ADC was not in a position to give battle orders and that he would only engage Malian forces on his own terms. Bahanga also reminded the ADC that he had a cease-fire agreement with the Malian government and that the ADC was therefore on its own. This led the ADC, which officially disarmed in 2006 following the signature of the Algiers Accords, to reconsider its negotiating position and the need for renewed firepower. This, at least in ag Sidamou's mind, was the genesis of the May 6 ADC attack in Diabali.

-----  
Failure of Algiers Accords All ATT's Fault  
-----

5.(C) Ag Sidamou said the situation in northern Mali was unraveling because President Amadou Toumani Toure was unwilling to work toward any solutions. He expressed disappointment with the international community's willingness to take President Toure's descriptions of his efforts to resolve the crisis at face-value and said the ADC had tried in vain, from July 2006 to April 10, 2008, to work with the President to apply the Algiers Accords. Like other Tuareg leaders, ag Sidamou urged the U.S. to assume a greater role in the mediation process, arguing that the U.S. could succeed where Algeria and Libya failed.

-----  
AQIM and the Austrian Hostages  
-----

6.(C) Ag Sidamou said Kidal Tuaregs were tired of AQIM's continued presence in traditional Tuareg zones and the tactic of holding westerners for ransom. "If you give us the means," he said, "we will go get the hostages right now. We are ready. We will put an end to the entire hostage trade in northern Mali. If you want AQIM's geo-coordinates so you can kill them, let us know." Noting that the Libyan government likely paid Bahanga for the release of three hostages who were handed over to the Libyan Consul to Mali on May 1 in

Kidal (Ref. F), he asked the U.S. to do everything it could to prevent a ransom payment for the Austrians, warning that such a payment would only result in further hostage crises. Ag Sidamou noted that what had first begun as the kidnapping of Germans and Austrians could easily spread to the taking of Americans and French hostages.

.(C) Ag Sidamou accused Mali of collaborating with AQIM on two levels. At the macro level, Ag Sidamou accused Mali of actively channeling AQIM into traditional Tuareg zones like Tessalit to fuel rumors of Tuareg ties to terrorism. At the micro level, he charged that several Malian officials were working with AQIM to secure a percentage of any eventual ransom payment for the release of the two Austrian hostages. Several of these officials are ethnic Arabs employed by the Malian government as mediators. These include army Major Lamana, Col. Mohamed Abderahmane Ould Meydou, businessman Mohamed Ould Laghwinat, and the Mayor of Almoustarat, Baba Ould Chouekh. (Comment. Major Lamana works for the Malian security services, is deeply implicated in criminal and likely terrorist activities, and is seemingly protected by the Director of State Security, Col. Mamy Coulibaly (Ref. G). Ould Meydou and Ould Chouekh are Telemsi Arabs from the Gao region. End Comment.)

8.(C) Like the Embassy's other Kidal Tuareg contacts, Ag Sidamou said Tuaregs simply want AQIM to vacate Tuareg lands. He admitted that some Tuareg smugglers sold fuel, food and other supplies to AQIM, but stressed that these linkages were commercial in nature and had nothing to do with shared ideologies or religious persuasions. He also cited ethnic reasons for Tuareg hostility toward AQIM's continued use of northern Mali as a safe haven. "They are Arabs," he said of the Algerian salafists who form the core of the AQIM cell in northern Mali, "and it is essential for them to leave our lands. We are not happy that this is occurring in our zone."

-----  
What Have You Done For Us Lately?  
-----

9.(C) At the start of the meeting, Ag Sidamou said he was  
BAMAKO 00000462 003 OF 003

happy to talk the Embassy because the U.S. "hasn't done Tuaregs much good, but hasn't done us any harm either." He argued that Mali receives "tens of thousands" of dollars in counter-terrorism assistance from the U.S. and other donors but is now using this money to fight Tuaregs instead of terrorists. With a palpable sense of irony, Ag Sidamou pointed out that the ADC remains the only military force in northern Mali willing and able to take on AQIM, having attacked AQIM directly once in 2006 and run into them a second time a few days later. If the U.S. doesn't want to collaborate with the Tuaregs, said Ag Sidamou, the U.S. should stop assisting the Malian military or, at the very least, pressure Mali to arrest individuals like Major Lamana and Col. Ould Meydou. (Comment. Ag Simadou, himself, has been reported to have economically facilitated AQIM activities as well in the past, making him a dubious ally in our counterterrorism work. End Comment.)

-----  
Comment: The Tuareg Diversion  
-----

10.(C) Although Ag Sidamou speaks largely for himself, his views of AQIM, the failure of the Algiers Accords, and the GOM's perceived focus on Tuaregs rather than terrorists are shared by other Kidal Tuaregs. The fact that he, like other Kidal Tuaregs, has a significant stake in retaining a certain amount of autonomy in the north so as to ensure continued income from smuggling further highlights the delicate balance that the USG must strike between supporting Malian sovereignty over their territory and providing economic alternatives to a population which historically controlled

the important trans-Saharan trade routes. Should tensions and clashes between the Malian military and Tuareg rebels increase, Tuaregs in opposition to the Malian government are likely to perceive counter-terrorism assistance provided by the U.S and other international donors to the Malian military as counter to Tuareg interests. In order to combat this perception, we will continue to engage directly with key Tuareg leaders, highlighting the many humanitarian assistance and USAID projects that have directly benefited Tuareg populations. We will also engage with the GOM to ensure that they are clear as to the nature of US-Malian military cooperation in the form of JCETs in the north.

11.(C) In regards to the suggestion made by ag Sidamou and other ADC members that the U.S. support ADC efforts to dislodge AQIM, it is clear that we can in no way support a proxy force - as Algeria did prior the ADC's battles with the GSPC in 2006 - that has attacked a democratically elected government and close ally, killing Malian soldiers and civilians. Such action would undermine the Malian government and further destabilize northern Mali. That said, we believe that negotiations between the ADC and the GOM are key to any resolution and will continue to push President Toure and other key Malian decision makers to create mixed military units as stipulated by the Algiers Accords. We will also maintain our clear position in support of credible investigations of the October 2007 murder of a Tuareg gendarme by members of the Malian 314th Infantry Company based in Kati (Ref. H), and the April 10-11 executions by unknown individuals in Kidal as an important means to assuage Tuareg concerns and distrust of the Malian government. In this regard, we have already raised the need for investigations with Malian military and civilian leaders and informed them that allegations of credible human rights abuses by members of the Malian military will affect our ability to provide future training.

MCCULLEY